



Remembering Our Heritage



4-10 February

5 Feb 1918: Lt Stephen W. Thompson, flying as a gunner in a French piloted airplane, achieved the distinction of being the first US Army member to shoot down an enemy aircraft in aerial combat. He shot down a German Albatros D.III, but is credited with only half the victory, sharing the "kill" with the French pilot.

9 Feb 1923: The 3rd Attack Group staged an exercise in which crews of the DeHavilland DH-4Bs and three Boeing GA-1 attack aircraft simulated an attack on a truck column near Laredo on the Mexican border. Brig Gen Billy Mitchell judged the exercise a success, noting: "I believe even with the way the group now is, no Mexican column can move in the daytime within 100 miles of where this group is stationed." While the group flew the DH-4B as their standard plane, it



also experimented with the GA-1, which had been developed by the Engineering Division at Wright Field, OH. The twin engine, triple wing attack plane was equipped with a 37-millimeter cannon and eight 30-caliber machine guns. Under Major Brereton's command, the 3rd Attack Group perfected new tactics involving DH-4Bs equipped the new A-3 bomb rack. They involved a low-altitude, high angle attack known as the "diving attack," patterned after similar tactics employed by the Royal Air Force during World War I. Major Ross E. Rowell, a Marine Corps pilot stationed at Kelly Field, observed and was impressed by the accuracy obtained by the 3rd Attack Group. He introduced it into his own squadron, VO-1M, at San Diego, California. Navy aviators soon picked up on the tactic and refined it. Lt Cmdr Frank D. Wagner, flying a Curtiss F6C Hawk, built to handle extreme stress, conducted a series of test in which the dive angle was increased. The Navy subsequently perfected dive-bombing, which it used to devastating effect during the Battle of Midway.



10 Feb 1940: Presidential Executive Order 8343 withdrew 50,000 additional acres of land for an air base near Anchorage. The lands included the Loop Road and Otter Lake area. The existing reservation lands withdrawn extended one mile north of the Eagle River, south around the beach of Cook Inlet for a distance of approximately 12 miles and east to the foothills of the Chugach Mountains.

10 Feb 1941: The Army re-designated the Alaska Defense Forces as the Alaska Defense Command. It remained under the IX Corps, later changed to the Western Defense Command, headquartered at Presidio,

CA, and commanded by Lt Gen John DeWitt. Maj Everett S. Davis was designated Chief of Aviation.

5 Feb 1942: The War Department redesignated the Alaskan Air Force as the 11th Air Force, commanded by Col Everett S. Davis. Assigned units included Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron; Provisional Pursuit Interceptor Command, commanded by Lt Col Norman D. Sillin, composed of the 11th and 18th Fighter Squadrons; 28th Composite Group, commanded by Lt Col William O. Eareckson, consisting of 36th, 73rd and 77th Bombardment Squadrons; 23rd Air Base Group; and Air Warning Service, Alaska.



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There were 439 officers and men assigned to the Interceptor Command, 1,055 in the 28th Composite Group and 1,466 in the 23rd Air Base Group and its service organizations. Eighty-five officers and men were assigned to the Air Warning Service, Alaska. The 23rd Air Base Group supplied maintenance services and operated a sub depot. There were a total of 3,045 assigned. There was a serious shortage of first lieutenants and even larger shortage of senior officers. The total number of officer vacancies totaled 24. A similar situation existed in the enlisted ranks. Brig Gen Simon Buckner continued to press the Western Defense Command and the War Department to assign qualified personnel to the Eleventh Air Force headquarters staff, only to be told that there were priorities elsewhere. He was promised branch-immaterial officers. General Buckner countered that he needed officers with specialized skills because of the conditions in Alaska. Finally, the War Department relented and told him he would get qualified officers. Months passed before they arrived. .

10 Feb 1943: The 36th Bombardment Squadron flew the last B-17 mission of the Aleutian Campaign. The squadron converted to B-24Ds between 21 January and 21 February. Lt Billy Wheeler wrote in his diary: "36 Bomb Sq flew last B-17 mission, on following day became B-24D outfit by order of Bmd Comd, and may an eye was moist as the big Boeings settled in their revetments for a well-deserved rest. Someone even proposed a mad dash to Paramushiru in our remaining seventeens--an heroic gesture in the manner of J.W Holmes Old Ironside." The Eleventh Air Force committed two B-17Es and four B-24Ds and eight B-25s accompanied by eight P-38s against the main camp on Kiska.



4 Feb 1944: The Navy conducted the first shore bombardment of the Japanese home islands when Task Group 94.6 under the command of RADM Wilder D. Baker, commenced fire at 0230 4 February, against Japanese facilities on Kurabu Cape Air Field, Paramushiru. The nine warships consisting of two light cruisers and seven destroyers fired 5,745 five and six inch shells during the 34-minute bombardment. The shore bombardment destroyed a Japanese merchant ship, started several fires and caused multiple secondary fires. Task Group

94.6 suffered no casualties. Sixteen P-38s from the 54th Fighter Squadron supported by six B-25s from the 77th Bombardment Squadron were committed to fly air cover for Navy Task Group 94.6 as it withdrew from the early morning shore bombardment of the airfield complex at Kurabu Cape. Of the 16 P-38s dispatched, ten failed to find the task group and two disappeared with their pilots, Lieutenants Henry L. Boeykens and Carl H. Priester Jr. The 77th Bombardment Squadron committed six B-25s to provide navigational support for the P-38s.

9 Feb 1944: The 3rd Bombardment Group conducted a low-level attack for the first time with their Douglas A-20 Havocs against Japanese installations on Corregidor Island, the first of four successive missions that week.



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10 Feb 1944: Admiral Chester Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command, wrote VADM Frank Jack Fletcher, Commander, North Pacific Force, to express his satisfaction with the North Pacific Force's preparation for attacks against the Japanese in the North Pacific. He noted that although the northern theater was not as active as other Pacific theaters, the situation could change at any time and foster operations on a large scale.

10 Feb 1952: The Alaskan Air Command Manpower Office completed a manning survey of Shemya AFB. Both the Aleutians Islands base and Thornbrough AFB, at Cold Bay, on the Alaska Peninsula were programmed for closure. The Air Force had initially planned to close both World War II bases, but had reversed its decision and kept them open following the outbreak of the Korean War. They supported the Great Circle Route to and from the Far East., used mostly by four-engine transports. The manpower office recommended that the 5021st Air Base Squadron be reduced as a subunit under the 39th Air Depot Wing instead of reporting to Headquarters, AAC, so that the number of personnel on Shemya could be reduced to the minimum essential. The office noted that the number of flights using the base had been significantly reduced and that the physical plant on the island could be consolidated and the hospital closed. The commander on Shemya rebutted the recommendation, noting that the cargo transiting the island, while not carrying as much cargo as in the past, had now increased passenger loads. He argued the need for more messing and billeting facilities. The Alaskan Air Command agreed with the manpower recommendations and allocated funding for consolidating facilities and repairing the dock area.



5 Feb 1957: Lt Gen Frank Armstrong, Alaskan Air Command Commander, expressed his desires for an offensive and defensive missile system in Alaska in a personal letter to Gen Otto P. Weyland, Commander, Tactical Air Command. He noted the need to develop within Alaska "the capability for an immediate air offensive in the general war coupled with a reasonable amount of air defense to back it

up." For the offensive force, he envisioned one TM-61B Matador group with eight missiles on alert launch and fifty-two others capable of being launched within a few hours. He proposed locating the missile launch complex in the Willow area north of Anchorage. The site could also be used to accommodate the SM-75 Thor intermediate-range ballistic nuclear missile then being tested at Cape Canaveral.

8 Feb 1957: The Alaskan Air Command activated the 713th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron at Bethel (F-21), 749th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron at Chiniak (F-18), 936th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron on Sitkinak Island (F-19) and 937th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron at Ohlson Mountain (F-25). Since there were no personnel available to man them prior to the release by the contractors, AAC assigned the squadrons a holding designation.





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7 Feb 1959: Based on the results of the Donna Marie I and II studies, Maj Gen Conrad Necrason, Alaskan Air Command Commander, recommended to the Air Force that contractors for manning the communications and electronics at all 18 aircraft control and warning stations be implanted. He pointed out that it cost \$3,928,200 annually to man and support the stations with 472 military personnel while 186 civilian contractors could do the job for \$2,139,000. He recommended that a contract be implemented on 1 July 1959. Headquarters, USAF, however, stated that the military was in the best position to perform the services. Maj Gen H.R. Maddux, Air Force Director of Manpower and Organization, stated that there had been some "disturbing questions about the quantitative differences in contractor and military manning levels." He realized the potential savings, but there was a need to resolve manning concepts and practices.



8 Feb 1960: HQ, USAF, informed Alaskan Air Command that it approved of its 3 December 1959 plan to transfer Ladd AFB to the Army, move the 449th Fighter Interceptor Squadron to Eielson AFB and consolidate air defense command and control and support functions at Elmendorf AFB. General Necrason, informed the Commander, Alaskan Command, of the Air Force plans, explaining in detail that AAC had proposed consolidating flying activities north of the Alaskan Range on Eielson AFB including moving the headquarters of the 11th Air Division to that

base. General Necrason also stated that the moves were contingent on obtaining funding. He recommended that senior officers from AAC and United States Army, Alaska be appointed to oversee the transfer details. The Army appointed Brig Gen Thomas A. Beck, Commanding General of the Yukon Command and the Air Force appointed Brig Gen Gordon H. Austin, Commander, 11th Air Division. The two began working together on transferring Ladd AFB to the Army, moving the Air Force activities there to Eielson AFB and the Army activities on Eielson AFB to Ladd AFB.

10 Feb 1960: The Air Force formally cancelled the Alaska Air Command Semi-Automatic Defense System (ALSADS). The Alaskan Air Command depended on a pre-Korean War manual air defense system consisting of vertical Plexiglas plotting boards behind which airmen entered air defense track data, writing backwards with grease pencils information passed to them by voice and teletype. The AAC had been seeking semi-automatic systems since 1954 that would improve data transmission, display and weapons control. Initially, AAC tried to obtain the Tactical Air Control System/Base Air Defense Ground Equipment (TACS/BAGE) system, which the Air Force was planning to replace its manual air defense command and control system with. The Air Force, however, cancelled the TACS/BAGE in favor of the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment System (SAGE) being developed. The Alaskan Air Command then sought to acquire the ALSADS instead which employed the AN/GPA-73 computer system with the goal of having the semi-automated system in place by September 1961.





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5 Feb 1961: The Alaskan Air Command dedicated Building 600 on Shemya AFS in honor of Lt Col George Irvin Poole, the former Commander, 5040th Air Base Squadron, Shemya AFS, who had been killed along with 14 others when their aircraft crashed on Mount Iliamna, approximately 120 miles southwest of Elmendorf AFB. Building 600, a composite facility designed to house 126 officers and 600 enlisted men, was the largest building on Shemya AFS and one of the largest in Alaska. It contained administrative offices, two dining halls, a dispensary, laundry,



lounges, post office, and base exchange.



8 Feb 1967: A C-123J, 64391, assigned to the Alaska Air National Guard, broke through the ice on Nuyakak Lake 110 miles northwest of King Salmon while taxiing. It was carrying a 6,500 pound load of lumber for the construction of a fish processing plant for the Eagle River Cold Storage Company. The Air Force had approved the flight on 3 February. The cargo plane

landed on the snow packed lake surface. During the landing roll, the C-123 broke through the ice and sunk to the wing pylons and horizontal stabilizers. It settled further once the engines were shut off, apparently kept afloat by the cargo of lumber. The C-123 came to rest 200 yards from shore over water 60 feet deep. Plans began immediately to recover it. An Army team, brought in by helicopter from King Salmon, made the initial attempt. The cargo plane was finally repaired and flown to Anchorage on 2 February 1968.

9 Feb 1969: All the Cessna A-37 Dragonfly aircraft assigned to the 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing were grounded due to cracked wing spar caps.

5 Feb 1971: The *Sourdough Sentinel* reported that AAC's Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) had received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award presented by Maj Gen Joseph A. Cunningham, Commander, AAC. Officially designated Detachment 1, Western Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Center, Military Airlift Command, the AAC RCC was responsible of covering 586,000 square miles of Alaska. The award citation recognized the center's "exceptional meritorious service from April 1, 1969 to December 31, 1969. Major Henry Stocker commanded the 11-man RCC at the time of award presentation. The RCC had been established in October 1961, and up until 31 December 1970 had received credit for saving 2,291 lives, directing 25,680 sorties on 2,755 missions that accumulated 44,293 flying hours.



8-11 Feb 1979: General James E. Hill, Commander-in-Chief, NORAD, Lt Gen G.A. MacKenzie, Commander, Air Command, Canada, and General Scott reached an agreement to include six Canadian positions in the Elmendorf AFB Regional Operations Control Center with the ranking Canadian being a lieutenant colonel who would service as the assistant operations director. The other ranks included a major, two captains, a sergeant and a corporal. They would replace a similar number of USAF positions.



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5 Feb 1980: The Alaskan Air Command Public Affairs Office released information that the two Boeing E-3 Sentry airborne warning and control aircraft would be assigned to Elmendorf AFB on rotational deployment during the 1982-1983 time frame. It announced that it would involve \$5.6 million in new construction projects. The E-3s would be deployed by the 552nd Airborne Warning and Control Wing from Tinker AFB, OK. The Alaskan Air Command planned to activate a flight to man the E-3.



4 Feb 1986: HQ USAF, announced that two E-3s with 280 additional personnel were being assigned on permanent rotation deployment to Elmendorf AFB. The local news media greeted the assignment with enthusiasm with headlines such as "AWACS to Boost Economy." Senator Murkowski took the opportunity to inform his constituents that "The Department of Defense took a major step in improving Alaska's defense capability by complying with Senator Ted Stevens and my request to permanently deploy two AWACS to Elmendorf this year." He went on to say that it would add 280 military and 15 civilian positions to Elmendorf AFB and boost the annual payroll by \$6.5 million.

5 Feb 1991: The *Anchorage Daily News*, quoting Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), reported that Elmendorf AFB would be receiving 26 F-15Es. The announcement caused some confusion because originally the 90th Fighter Squadron had been programmed to be equipped with 24 primary authorized aircraft (PAA) F-15Es and 2 backup aircraft inventory (BAI) F-15Es. General Merrill McPeak, Air Force Chief of Staff, reduced the number to 18 PAA and 2 BAI because of other requirements. The Air Force did not release the information to the public. While classified documents discussed strength of 20 F-15Es, the unclassified versions continue to note 26 aircraft. Based on the original assignment of the 24 long-range interdiction and air-to-air fighters, 941 manpower authorizations had been programmed for the squadron and its base support when a public news release of its assignment to Elmendorf AFB was made 5 November 1990. The number was subsequently reduced to 767 authorizations. It included 326 in the squadron, 254 maintenance personnel, 128 base operations support personnel and 60 other personnel.



5 Feb 1998: The 90th Fighter Squadron (90 FS) deployed 18 F-15Es and over 200 personnel to Korea. The majority of the personnel and all of the aircraft went to Kwang-Ju Air Base while a CADRE went to Taegu Air Base. The deployment lasted until 8 June 1998. While deployed, the 90 FS were under the operational control of Seventh Air Force. During this deployment, the squadron flew 1,204 joint combat training sorties in Korea.